

Ask The Headhunter®

the insider's edge on job search & hiring™

fearless job hunting™

Overcome the daunting obstacles
that stop other job hunters dead
in their tracks

BOOK TWO

Avoid Employment Scams,
Ruses & Rackets

The Very Best
MYTH-BUSTING
ANSWERS *from the*
Ask The Headhunter Newsletter



Nick Corcodilos

North Bridge
Press ▲

Ask The Headhunter®

the insider's edge on job search & hiring™

Ask The Headhunter® | Fearless Job Hunting™
Book 2: Avoid Employment Scams, Ruses & Rackets
By Nick Corcodilos

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Get the edge

Ask any talented job hunter: Did you follow all the proper steps in your job search? *Of course.* What went wrong? *I hit an unexpected obstacle.*

Success in job hunting isn't about chasing job postings, sending resumes, and filling out endless online application forms. If any of it worked, you'd have the job you want.

In the real world, "the steps" lead to failure when you encounter daunting obstacles – the inevitable obstructions that trip you up. Either you know what to do to overcome them, or you lose. Success at job hunting is about knowing what to do when you hit the wall:

- A personnel manager rejects you. Should you walk away?
- You're unemployed. How do you explain it?
- A friend gives you a contact. How do you make it pay off?
- An employer wants your salary history. How do you say *no*?
- It's between you and Candidate #1. How do you show that you're the more profitable hire?
- You received an offer, but a better one is pending. The first employer wants an answer now. How do you protect yourself?
- The interview went well, but they're not calling back. What now?

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ing
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cles

How you cope with these obstacles will make or break your job search, no matter how good your resume is, how clever your interview answers are, or how many jobs you've applied for. I'd like to give you an edge, and help you anticipate and overcome the intimidating roadblocks when you're trying to land a job, so you can stand out as the most profitable hire.

Every one of the Q&A lessons in the *Fearless Job Hunting* books is based on a real obstacle encountered by a real person in the real world, told in their own words. I've answered over 30,000 such questions. The best Q&As made it into the *Ask The Headhunter Newsletter*. And now I've selected the toughest

questions and my very best advice, expanded my answers, and added much more – to create *Fearless Job Hunting*.

Millions of job applicants get rejected every day because winning a job isn't as easy as posting your resume, filling out forms, and explaining where you see yourself in five years. The best way to stand out is to show an employer why you're the profitable hire. You must be fearless about selecting and approaching the right employers, and about demonstrating your value.

If this were easy, everyone would be landing jobs. But they're not. Contrary to what the job boards promise, job search isn't an automated process where you file your keywords and a database delivers a job to you. Demonstrating how you will help a company be more successful is hard work – but so is that great job you want. Long-time *Ask The Headhunter Newsletter* subscriber Ray Stoddard explains it like this:

"The great news about your recommendations is that they work. The good news for those of us who use them is that few people are really willing to implement what you recommend, giving those of us who do an edge."

As Ray suggests, success means doing the work to get the edge you need – while others wait for the system to process them.

I've taught these obstacle-busting lessons to Executive MBA students at UCLA, Cornell, Harvard, Northwestern and other top schools, and to corporations, professional associations, career coaches, salespeople, IT professionals, college students and people in almost every line of work. The roadblocks they face disappear when they learn how to stand out:

"It took me only three months to land my dream job. I'm 100% positive it was because I followed your *Ask The Headhunter* advice and 'did the job' in the interview. That simple maneuver set me apart from all the others vying for the job. Thank you, Nick. Being a member of this community has literally changed my life." - *Elizabeth Weintraub*

This isn't rocket science. Once you get it, it's obvious. Each of the *Fearless Job Hunting* lessons shows you how to overcome daunting obstacles that stop other job hunters dead in their tracks. Get the edge – and say hello to total control over your job search.

Nick Corcodilos
Ask The Headhunter

Say hello to total control over your job search

9 *Fearless Job Hunting* books each cover a different set of daunting challenges you're likely to face in your job search. Each book tackles its topic from several directions, using the Q&A format of the acclaimed *Ask The Headhunter Newsletter*. Each book is designed to give you more control over your job search—by itself. Whether you need one, a few, or all of the books to help you become a more fearless job hunter is up to you.

I hope you'll tolerate my judgments about which Q&A lessons fit under which topics. Sometimes there's overlap, just as there is in real life. The objective is to overcome obstacles that stop other people dead in their tracks, so you can land the job you want.

BOOK ONE

Jump-Start Your Job Search

BOOK TWO

Avoid Employment Scams, Ruses & Rackets

BOOK THREE

Get in The Door (way ahead of your competition)

BOOK FOUR

Overcome Human Resources Obstacles

BOOK FIVE

Get The Right Employer's Full Attention

BOOK SIX

The Interview: Be The Profitable Hire

BOOK SEVEN

Win The Salary Games (long before you negotiate an offer)

BOOK EIGHT

Play Hardball With Employers

BOOK NINE

Be The Master of Job Offers

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BOOKS ONE to NINE

Contains the full text of all nine
Fearless Job Hunting books
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Notes from fearless job hunters

Dear
Nick,

I read your book, used your advice on my next interview, and got the job. Funny thing is, the manager that interviewed me read your book, too. I was prepared to “do the job” and she was asking me to “do the job.” At the end of the interview, the only thing left was getting the paperwork completed for my new position. Thanks a bunch! *Paul Frantz*

I got a job because I follow your blog relentlessly and read your books. I interviewed Friday and got an offer the following Monday because I was ready to talk about the job and how I was going to solve their problems. I didn't like the first offer so I countered. They came back today with the exact dollar amount I wanted. *Larry Leatherwood*

How'd I get an offer so fast? According to my boss, it's the first time he's seen someone “solve a problem so effectively in the interview”—a technique I learned from *Ask The Headhunter*. Three months into my new job, I still can't believe I'm getting paid for this. Thanks for your advice over the years! *Bill Blum*

You've been my secret weapon in the jobs market for a long time now. I landed a 6-figure role by taking control of the interview and articulating a clear value proposition to the employer. Many thanks for opening my eyes to just how dysfunctional the conventional job hunting methods are. *Serchen Pillay*

I got the job! I still don't believe what I was able to accomplish with your guidance: I got a job in my target industry, in my target city, in my target role, at a high level and not an entry level. All of that despite the fact that I was moving to a city where I didn't know anyone, had little experience in that industry, and was unemployed for 10 months. My phone call with you was the best money I ever spent. It will return tens of thousands of dollars for me over the next few years and probably hundreds of thousands over my lifetime. *Jeremy Gorr*

I am writing to thank you for writing and publishing the best career advice column that's out there. You cut to the chase and say what others don't have the guts to. I relied heavily on your guidance for a recent job search and, after a four month courtship, landed my dream job at an awesome company. *Christine Creager*

After being laid off, I used your techniques to snag a great job at a higher salary and with better benefits than at the last position. And that was in a down market! One more thing: Because I “did the job in the interview,” the company created an extra position specifically for me. *Diana Ost*

fearless job hunting

BOOK TWO

Avoid Employment Scams,
Ruses & Rackets



Is that a job offer in my mailbox?



Job hunters are easy marks. Eager to land a new position, and often frustrated by the employment system, they're willing to spend lots of money to land a job. Add a bit of desperation, and easy marks become suckers for the employment rackets.

Question

I get all sorts of solicitations in my e-mail, claiming they're going to find me a job if I pay them. I realize most of this is garbage, but I wonder if some of these are legit offers. How do I tell them apart?

Nick's Reply

Let's take a look at what tempts you: those e-mails that offer to help you land a job. I've been conducting some unscientific research, and I want to share the results with you. It might help save you lots of money and time.

I get so much junk e-mail from companies offering to help me find a job, or to help me fill job openings, that I started saving them. I created a folder named *Career Crap* and now it's so full, I need to call the septic man to clean it out. But it bears a little inspection... (yuck).

Why did I bother saving these solicitations? Because I realize that *Ask The Headhunter* readers don't see this kind of advertising the way I do. To the uninitiated, some of these promotions actually sound good. My goal was to round up the seemingly most-appealing solicitations that arrive in our e-mail boxes so we could look them over more carefully. I'll try to explain why they all qualify for routing to my *Career Crap* e-mail folder.

(A short note: When you see words all in CAPS in this section, it's because that's how those words appear in the marketing materials I've received. Yes, I'm mocking the *Career Crap* vendors.)

Less-stupid job hunting?

The first pick of the litter is a service that wants to help you find the most jobs FAST. It will help you access over 500 jobs-and-résumés sites "instantly and simultaneously." For a paltry fee, these guys will act as your personal

Is that a job offer in my mailbox?

agent and post your résumé on all these sites. This is SMARTER than just posting your résumé on the four biggest job sites for free – right?

The assumption behind this solicitation is that you yearn to post your résumé on any and every job board. Think about this carefully.

Imagine applying for hundreds of jobs all at once. Are there really hundreds of jobs out there that are right for you? Of course not. A smart job search isn't about lots of jobs; it's about making the right choices. Even the cleverest database system can't make good choices for you. If there were a database that could do that, employers would hire most of their new employees through sites like Monster, CareerBuilder, Indeed, and SimplyHired. The fact is, they don't.

If these databases actually delivered jobs, you'd be glad to fork over thousands of dollars to use them – not just the \$49 this particular service charges.

That's why sites like Monster don't provide metrics about their success. They tout all the millions of résumés and job listings that they publish. But if you ask them how many of these get matched up successfully, they don't know. "We can't track that." Really? Studies by independent firms like Forrester Research and CareerXroads show that only about 4% of jobs are filled by employers that use Monster.

So before you pay for "access" to otherwise free jobs-and-résumés sites, consider whether you want to play those kinds of odds.

Stupid job hunting. *Flush.*

Added value for you, or added revenue for them?

But wait! The first multi-site service in my Career Crap folder provides "added value," too. They'll write your cover letter "to make your résumé shine." Hey, who doesn't want help with a cover letter? We all know that a cover letter is just as important as the résumé, right? That's why it needs to be "tailor made," to grab each "specific" employer's attention.

Yep: Let some writer who doesn't know you, or the company you're applying to, write that all-important cover letter that will make you look like a

Is that a job offer in my mailbox?

It's a wasteland out there: Who can help you land a job?

The harder it is to find work, the more e-mail you'll receive from sophisticated-sounding scammers offering to help you.

It used to be that these "job search consultants" charged thousands. Now that it's even harder to land a job, you can sign up with a "job-search club" for about \$30, because the scammers are desperate for your attention. Desperate job hunters are even more likely to sign up. So the price comes down.

My advice

Hook up with a professional association that has online discussion groups. Look for postings from managers and successful members who share your work interests. They're the ones that will take time to get to know you. So get to know them. Establish your credibility. These are the insiders who will make the credible personal referrals that will help you.

Needless to say, establishing such work-oriented relationships in person is even better. The best associations conduct meetings in real buildings and real people attend in real time. ■

"prepared and interested candidate" to each and every employer who actually finds it buried in an online database.

More-stupid job hunting. *Flush.*

In-your-face job hunting

Our next load of advertising invites you to be "proactive" rather than passive. Why wait for employers to find your application (or résumé), when you can shove it in their faces via e-mail?

This particular service promises to deliver your résumé directly to thousands of "high quality employers and recruiters" who are looking for people JUST LIKE YOU!

Now, imagine what happens when thousands of people JUST LIKE YOU use this service. Each poor employer's e-mail box gets swamped with thousands of résumés of people they don't know – résumés rendered all the more questionable because they came from a résumé mill. Is it time for these lucky employers to start interviewing all those thousands of applicants? Or time to change e-mail addresses to avoid all that junk mail?

Any résumé delivery service that uses junk mail to advertise its mass-mail résumé services is telling you one thing: *It's in the junk-mail business.* Do you really want your résumé to be part of a junk-mail delivery to a bunch of employers? Need I say more?

Closer inspection reveals that the "Success Stories" page on this particular website is "under construction" and "coming soon." But, there's one little bonus you just can't beat, buried deep in the site's privacy policy. At your request this service will remove *all copies* of your résumé, *except for an archival copy.* What do they do with the archival copy? They don't say, but that's about as much privacy as the gullible can swallow.

Flush.

How to get to "the boss"

The third service that made the cut will let you post a "fresh version" of your résumé to multiple career sites. That's a new one on me. How do they

Is that a job offer in my mailbox?

know it's fresh? They don't say. For one low, low fee you can post all the versions of your résumé that you want to. But that's not what caught my attention.

The advertisement about this service uses an old pitch that most of the major job boards dropped long ago because of its implications. It claims that, if you fork over the fee, your résumé can be found by over a million employers and recruiters – or by anyone else who's looking for it. What a great job-hunting strategy: Tell everyone in the world that you're desperately seeking a job anywhere and everywhere. The real fun starts when one of these sites uses its "software agent" to deliver your résumé to your current boss.

Flush.

So far, we've reviewed career solicitations that "help you get your résumé into the right hands." We've looked at services that automatically plaster your résumé on hundreds of job boards, at others that regularly post "fresh copies" of it, and at some that send it only to "high quality employers and recruiters." We explored why these solicitations deserve the old *flush* – either because they bury your résumé amidst millions of others online, or because they magically turn your résumé into junk mail.

Now let's look at some "elite" services that realize you're too smart to believe in job boards or junk mail. This class of career solicitations offers something smarter...

Let's get really smart

Why e-mail your résumé to recruiters and employers who will just delete it along with all the other junk they receive daily in their "regular mail?" Imagine that you could have the "private, unpublished, CHOSEN mail boxes" of those recruiters and employers. Wouldn't that be just great?

For a few bucks, it's all yours. Now, this is a great service! By purchasing and using these addresses, you will make sure the recruiter APPRECIATES receiving your résumé (the caps are not mine). This service points out that you aren't stupid, are you? Why go for that silly "quantity deal" that the other services tout? These guys will give you the "quality deal." This top-

Is that a job offer in my mailbox?

tier service requires recruiters to sign up for its service. Trouble is, there's no sign-up area for recruiters on the site. (Oops.)

But, you might think, what if these guys really *do* have the e-mail addresses of real headhunters? Wouldn't that be worth a few bucks?

I'll let you in on a little secret. (For free.) I get unsolicited résumés in my "private" e-mail box every day because there's no way to keep an address private any more. I delete these with nary a thought. It takes me about half a second to judge whether an e-mail I've received is one I want to read. The rest go bye-bye. And that's as it should be. When a client pays me *to go find* the best candidates for a position at his company, I spend my time *actually looking* for those candidates, not sitting at my computer waiting for the right résumé to magically (and randomly) appear. If I spent the time necessary to review every résumé that was mailed to me, I'd quickly go out of business.

This service charges \$89 for the "high-level package," which allows you to submit your résumé just once to all those recruiters. But, for an additional \$19 you may continue to use the service for your "lifetime." Gee. We go from one use of the database to *unlimited lifetime* use. For just a few more bucks, you can harass those headhunters all you want!

My favorite part of the pitch: The software that accomplishes these feats was created by recruiters "who absolutely know what they're doing." If they knew what they were doing, they'd be earning \$30,000 per placement, like real headhunters, to fill positions for clients, not hawking junk-mail services.

Flush.

According to surveys done by the U.S. Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics, and by research firms like Forrester Research and CareerXroads, between 40%-70% of jobs are found and filled through personal contacts, and about 4% through job boards like CareerBuilder. The other employment rackets aren't even on the scale.

How much of your time are you spending on the various job rackets? You could try to work it out mathematically, or you could just *flush*.

Are blind ads bogus?



How can you decide which blind ads are worth responding to? My advice: Don't take the risk. He who goes when called to meet a faceless caller is looking for trouble.

Question

Why do some companies use blind ads, or job postings, in which the hiring company's name is not listed, and which invite you to "reply to a confidential address?" Are they real jobs, or are they bogus? Are headhunters just attempting to gather names for their databases? What are these advertisements all about?

Responding to these types of advertisements really makes no sense to me. I got the impression from your book that it may be a bad idea in general to respond to such ads. Could you please explain why?

Nick's Reply

What you found in one of my books is the "Interview-itis" test (see page 11), and it reveals why it's so important to know the company you are applying to. Otherwise, you're trying to get interviews for their own sake—and that's dumb.

Would you share private, personal information about yourself with someone about whom you know nothing—not even their name? Yet people reply to "blind" employment ads all the time. It's sheer folly. In one of the worst scenarios, the applicant finds out too late that it's his own company that he has sent his résumé to.

Yes, some headhunters (and employers) run blind ads just to fill their databases. They like to have a rolling inventory of résumés to turn to when they actually need to fill a job, whether *today* there's a job open or not.

There's usually a tip-off, though. Such job ads or postings are *composites*. That is, the requirements they list cover several different jobs. The advertiser hopes to attract résumés for all those jobs, all for the price of one posting.

Are blind ads bogus?

The other tip-off is that you receive little or no feedback about your application, because there is no active search going on for candidates. Meanwhile, you are left wondering whether this employer is going to call you. Now you have one possible answer.

Some headhunters run blind ads because they're recruiting for a client who requires secrecy until appropriate candidates are identified. However, such secrecy is only rarely justified. Good headhunters know where their quarry is, and they go there to pursue it. They don't need to post positions or to be so cagey. When a headhunter claims an ad is blind because the search is highly confidential, that's suspicious. The headhunter can list his own firm's name and contact information, thereby protecting his client's identity.

Of course, employers themselves will sometimes run blind postings, but few positions are so sensitive. And as I've suggested, an employer can use a good headhunter to insulate itself.

Another purpose for blind ads is the insulation of a company's managers. The human resources department (HR) simply doesn't want tenacious job hunters talking to hiring managers because HR wants complete control over the hiring process. So the ad doesn't disclose the employer.

Are some of these blind ads scams? As we've discussed, yes. It's a scam to run a composite ad implying there's a job open when there isn't. It's also a scam when an employer runs a blind ad hoping to catch some of its own employees job hunting, in a misguided effort to identify disloyal employees. It's a scam when an independent "recruiter" runs blind ads to gather résumés which she can distribute – unsolicited – to a mailing list of employers, hoping to score a placement fee, without actually having an assignment.

Is it a scam when the "opportunity" is some hokey multi-level marketing (MLM) "job?" I leave that for you to decide. MLM has found a good tool in blind ads. Not many people would reply to an MLM ad, but many might be intrigued by the mystery of a seemingly-secret solicitation. The trouble is, after you reject a clever MLM advertiser, he may nonetheless add your contact information to his database – and sell it to others.

Are blind ads bogus?

Perhaps the worst blind-ad scam is identity theft. Consider all the confidential information that's on your résumé—information that can be used to impersonate you. It's all there: Your full name, address, e-mail address and telephone number, several recent employers, your job titles, your memberships in professional and civic associations, the schools you attended and your degrees, and in some cases your hobbies and names of your spouse and children. (You might be surprised just how much information people put on résumés.) This data is then cross-referenced against other databases that might include your illegally-obtained social security number, bank account numbers or other sensitive data. An identity thief doesn't need much to cash in on the information you provided on your résumé.

Some blind ads are legitimate. There's a real employer, a real job and a real opportunity – and possibly a legitimate reason for the secrecy. Your challenge is to figure out *which ones*. Is there a chance you're missing out on a juicy top-secret job? Sure, and I'm James Bond.

If you don't know who's asking for your résumé, there's no way to check them out. How can you decide whether they are worth working for? My advice: Don't take the risk. He who goes when called to meet a faceless caller is looking for trouble.

But that's not the end of this issue. There's more to the *Ask The Headhunter* message than a warning about blind ads: *Don't waste your time chasing job ads of any kind. Learn to be your own headhunter and to go after the jobs you want, not the ones that "come along."*

HR exec reveals résumé racket



Job hunters, pay attention. Executives, take special note. When you pay someone to job hunt for you, your credibility goes down the pipe.

Question

I'm a Director of Human Resources for a mid-size company, and I'd love to hear your comments on the uselessness of mass résumé mailing. I have received 30 almost-identical résumés from different applicants who obviously used the same résumé development and mailing service – a service that claims mass mailing your résumé to anywhere from 5,000 to (egads!) 20,000 or more CEOs and presidents is more effective and lucrative than good old-fashioned networking.

This company's claim (I visited their website) is that networking gets you a lower salary than you had in your last job, while their turn-up-the-volume method doubles your salary or more. (A falsehood, I say! My experience has been very lucrative with networking, and I have utilized your good coaching in the past.)

The sad part is how much of our company's information this service got wrong, making their client applicants appear less credible than the average unsolicited résumé submission. It was so bad that I actually called the service, told them of their error, and asked them to cease and desist.

Nick, how can these people sleep at night?

Nick's Reply

They sleep with wads of hundred-dollar bills in their pillows, because there's a sucker born every minute.

Sometimes the best advice and insight in *Ask The Headhunter* appears in the question section of a Q&A column, when a savvy reader like you shares her insider knowledge about a subject. I don't need to add much more to what you've told us.

HR exec reveals résumé racket

What gets me is that the higher up the executive ranks we go, the more sweaty palms we find at job search time. Otherwise-smart execs turn into nervous Nellies, convinced that the more they spend on career help, the smarter they must be and the luckier they will get.

It's very telling when an HR manager exposes these career rackets for what they are. Come on, folks – do you really think some résumé service is going to research employers more effectively than you can? Do you think they can really select the right employers and jobs for you? Do you really want your résumé to be one of those 30 almost-identical résumés this HR manager has received?

I've told a similar story many times. A fellow wrote me to say he had paid one of these services \$5,000 to mail out 3,000 copies of his résumé to “highly targeted” companies. He got zero responses. But, why should he expect any? As this HR manager points out, employers treat such résumés as junk mail.

Thanks for revealing what happens to all those cookie-cutter résumés once they're received in the HR office. Job hunters, pay attention. Executives, take special note. When you pay someone to job hunt for you, your credibility goes down the pipe.

(For more about related employment rackets, see Mr. CFO's firsthand account of [The Executive Marketing Racket: How I dropped ten grand down hole](#) and [Rip-Off Edition: Who's trying to sell you a job?.](#))

Terminal Interviewing: Interview-itis

Bonus

Remember that interviews are not jobs. The goal of the job search is the right job, not more interviews. Don't contract *interview-itis*.

The employment industry concentrates on finding and doing interviews, and only indirectly does it address a person's abilities or an employer's job needs. The employment industry comprises what I call personnel jockeys: "resources" who will help you do the job of finding a job. They will teach you how to do it, and how to spend as much of your time as possible doing it. They will make it your new career.

Their mission is helping you apply to as many jobs as possible (More irons in the fire!) and to go on as many interviews as possible (It's great practice!), and then to schedule more (This is a numbers game!).

Terminal Interviewing

Bam! You've got *interview-itis*.

The success of personnel jockeys depends on you catching this affliction. Once you catch it, they offer you the cure: more résumés, more interviews, more advice about résumés and interviews. The clearest symptom of interview-itis is when you start to act like doing interviews is your job.

Doing interviews is not *your* job.

Doing interviews is *their* job. Don't let anyone confuse you.

How do you know whether you've contracted interview-itis? Look at how you're spending your time. If you are spending most of your time responding to job postings, sending out résumés, going on interviews, and talking to personnel jockeys, you've got interview-itis.

Try this test:

Terminal Interviewing: Interview-itis

Have You Got Interview-itis?

Your frustration will heat up when you pursue interviews for their own sake. This can lead to a terminal condition called Waiting By The Phone. Score 10 °F for each symptom you have. If your temperature is above 100 °F, you've got Interview-itis.

Symptoms of Interview-itis

Check if you:

- Spend more than 10 minutes per day on job boards
- Apply to more than three job listings per week
- Send more résumés to HR than to actual hiring managers
- Never sent a résumé to an actual hiring manager
- Saw a posting for the perfect job and are very excited about it
- Sent a résumé to a blind ad (no employer name listed)
- Interviewed with HR before meeting with the hiring manager
- Spent more time meeting with HR than with the manager
- Never met with the hiring manager
- Knew more about the job than the HR representative did
- Didn't know the hiring manager's name until HR told you
- Filled out more than one form prior to your first interview
- Called HR to follow-up after you met with the manager (rather than calling the manager)
- Were told by an HR rep to please not call them, they will call you
- Were told by HR (rather than by the hiring manager) that you're not qualified
- Interviewed with, but never heard back from, the hiring manager
- Have been on more than two interviews in a week
- Have been on more than five interviews but don't have any job offers
- Registered with more than one employment agency
- Sent your resume to more than one headhunter
- Sent your résumé to the same employer more than once in six months
- Were told by HR that the company is not presently hiring

Terminal Interviewing: Interview-itis

- Sent your résumé to a headhunter who said it wasn't necessary to meet you
- Were told by the headhunter or employment agency that it would send your résumé to lots of employers
- Paid to have your résumé written by someone who never met you
- Filled out a form from which a résumé shop created your résumé
- Paid a career counselor lots of money to learn how to "market yourself"

Score 10 °F for each symptom you checked off. If your temperature is above 100 °F, you've got interview-itis.

Remember that interviews are not jobs. To recover from interview-itis, work at identifying and pursuing the right company and the right job. Keep your temperature and your frustration under control by going on fewer interviews and focusing on the jobs you really want.

Career Help: Don't get suckered



Never approach any kind of career help with the idea that someone can guarantee you a job, much less a particular salary. Research, read, study, learn, and plan your future. Don't be lazy. A job hunter that desperately wants someone else to find him a job is easily suckered.

They charge whatever they think you can pay

In 2003, Illinois Attorney General Lisa Madigan filed a complaint in Cook County Circuit Court accusing Bernard Haldane & Associates of consumer fraud. (Haldane was one of the biggest names in "career management" and was accused of fraud in Virginia, California, Colorado and Kansas.)

This Illinois complaint revealed how the fee racket works. The *Chicago Sun-Times* (10/9/03) explained Haldane's "client selection" policy in more detail:

"The company targeted primarily middle- and upper-management job seekers, but clients with less formal education were told that wouldn't be an obstacle to their finding a high-paying job... The suit alleges the defendants took financial profiles of each applicant and charged clients fees based on their liquid assets. The fees ranged between \$3,500 and \$12,500. Customers were unfairly charged different fees for the same service, according to the suit, filed in Cook County Circuit Court." ■

Question

My husband just spent an interesting hour or so with a career management firm that has been in the business for 50 years. They want \$4,600. They say they can help him find a job in 90 days with an average of 25% raise in pay. They do personality stuff, interview taping, etc. and set you up with some CEOs. Their marketing philosophy is to not look for vacancies. I believe it would be good for my husband to do this, although he was fortunate enough to go through a lot of the interview skills training with the company that recently laid him off.

Are these types of firms worth it? It is hard for us to let go of this kind of cash right now – we have a growing family. Help!

Nick's Reply

I've heard more horror stories from people who've signed up with such firms than success stories. \$4,600 is at the low end of the fees such firms charge. \$10,000 and \$20,000 tabs are common. They often quote you a fee only after they have estimated your assets. (See sidebar.)

While there are legitimate career counseling firms (this business goes by many monikers), many of them are rip-offs. You should be very cautious. Consumer fraud has been reported widely and the media have had a field day with it. (See this CBC-TV exposé: [Recruitment Rip-Off](#).)

Read the contract.

If you read the fine print carefully, you'll quickly conclude that the promises many of these firms make are merely a sales ploy, and irrelevant in light of the disclaimers you will probably find. They won't guarantee your husband a job, any particular salary level, or a refund if he's dissatisfied.

Career Help: Don't get suckered

No references? No dice.

Here's the tip-off about the crooks in the career industry: They will claim their client lists are confidential. *Bunk.* Any career firm that's proud of its record has references from satisfied customers that it's glad to share.

One smart consumer tells this story about asking for references:

"I received a call from a big name company after completing an online survey. I spoke with an 'associate' who asked me to come in for a counseling session to discuss my situation. I asked, 'Tell me, what references can be provided stating you helped CEOs?' The reply: 'I'm not the one who can answer that. You'll have to talk to Joe and Joe will get back to you sometime today.' It's been a week and still no call from Joe..." ■

Read the guarantee.

What they will typically guarantee, if they can't find your husband a job in the time suggested, is "all the additional counseling" he can swallow for as long as he can stand it. Read the fine print carefully.

Read the guarantee again.

I have never seen the contract that guarantees a cash refund if you're dissatisfied. Is there a refund provision? What triggers it? How much do you get back? Who decides it's time for a refund, you or the firm?

Never pay up front.

Look at how the firm charges. You want to pay as you go, not in one lump sum up front. A legitimate firm will charge as you go, so you can stop any time if you are not satisfied, and limit your losses. If they want thousands in advance, hang up the phone. It's the surest a sign of a racket.

Leave your spouse at home.

Does the firm require that you bring your spouse to the meeting? This is routine. The purpose is simple: People tend to rationalize paying lots of money for something if the salesman can overcome all objections at once. The salesman doesn't want you going home to a spouse who will help you think clearly about a questionable deal. Having the spouse present increases the salesman's control, and the chances that his sales pitch will terrify you both into signing up and paying on the spot.

Meet the counselor.

Before you sign and pay, meet the person who will actually work with you. Often, the impressive "point man" who sells you the service isn't the person who does the actual counseling once you've paid. Too often, the counselor is some greenhorn you've never met. The counselor's name should be in the contract. Get their credentials in writing. Know what you're paying for.

Check references.

Questionable firms will tell you they cannot disclose the names of clients. The line they give is frankly pathetic: "We're sure you understand that these high-ranking corporate executives are very private people. We simply cannot reveal their names." *Bunk.* No references, no dice. (See sidebar.) Talk with clients the firm has "placed," and current ones as well. How does the

Career Help: Don't get suckered

Secret jobs

"One of the misleading statements is that they have access to a secret job market. Job offers that nobody else knows about. Well, in fact the victims in these cases have looked and found that the information is available on the internet so they are lying about that, that is misleading and a violation of the consumer fraud act."

**Illinois Attorney General
Lisa Madigan**

Oops!

"The attorney general's office said Bernard Haldane and Associates conducted psychological exams of the clients but had no one qualified to analyze the results of the tests."

Chicago Sun-Times

firm treat its current customers? I'd also want to talk with a couple of companies where the firm has placed people. Are the employers happy with the hires? Finally, talk with at least one more former client who got her money back, if one exists. (No firm is 100% successful. The telling story is the one about the client that the firm could not help.) Finally, be wary of "reference setups." This is when you're given the name of a confederate as a reference. In other words, it's a fake reference who works for the firm.

Do they boast about "confidential lists?"

These firms claim (or sometimes just imply) that they have "secret job listings" or "insider contacts" at companies that will want to hire you. They suggest that they will make top-level introductions after you pay up. Before you pay, demand to see the list. The sad truth is, if they had such contacts, these firms would be in the executive search business, earning \$30,000-\$50,000 from an employer for placing you. Their "exclusive contacts databases" are likely little more than public domain lists taken off the Internet. But you won't know until you pay.

Check the tests.

Your husband received interview training from his employer at no cost. If he wants to try some personality or aptitude tests, his *alma mater* probably offers them for a small fee. Contact the alumni association. Or, a local college can likely administer the tests and help interpret them. Find out what such testing actually costs, before doling out big bucks to a private firm. Finally, find out who interprets any tests the firm will administer, and request samples of test results and reports. (See sidebar.)

Trace the history of the principals

Did the counselor or the principals of the firm ever work for one of the big "career management firms" whose ads you'll find in major newspapers? The diaspora of these "firms" are legion. They are routinely shut down by the authorities but resurface quickly under new names, running the same racket. Have the principals of this firm ever worked for a recently-defunct firm? Have they ever been busted? The Internet is riddled with complaints of scams that list names, times, locations and other details about scammers.

Career Help: Don't get suckered

The \$7,000 phone call

An Ask The Headhunter reader did his reference checking:

"Your web site saved me from making a grave error. I went to a 'career marketing company' and they wanted \$7,000 up front to get me 'in front of decision makers.' When I dug a little deeper, I came across your site and decided to use some of the advice to find out if they were for real. I simply asked for references in two telephone voicemail messages and one e-mail message.

"I followed up 48 hours later to find out why they didn't get back to me, and the pitchman responded with an e-mail: 'We have decided not to move forward at this time.'

"Of course, they figured out I was on to their scam and decided to cut and run to the next 'client.' A half hour on your site was worth more than \$7,000 in my pocket."

Jim Myers

Look for tip-offs.

Here's another good tip-off to a racket: The firm's website will have several "testimonial quotes" saying how great the service is – but there will be no names attached to them. Another tip-off: The website doesn't list the names of any principals of the firm or their biographies, and there isn't a street address. These firms don't want the authorities to find them. Even if they list an address, check it out to make sure it's real.

Never approach any kind of career help with the idea that someone can guarantee you a job, much less a particular salary, no matter what the fee. It's easy to fall prey to the sales pitch when you really need a job. A good counselor can help you search for a job and prepare to pursue it, but anyone who promises you a job – but isn't an employer – is a fraud.

There are legitimate career counseling and coaching firms, but to find them you must check references carefully. Like the headhunting business, the career industry has been sullied by opportunists and crooks. It's up to you to be careful who you engage. The good ones will gladly give you names of clients and let you talk with them. (See the sidebar on this page.)

Good career counselors will tell you up front what they will actually do for you, but they won't promise you a job. That's why they call it counseling.

My advice: If you need help, start for free at your local library. (One good reference librarian is better than any search engine.) Research, read, study, learn, and plan your future. Don't be lazy. A job hunter that desperately wants someone else to find him a job is easily suckered. If you decide you need one-on-one help, seek out good, honest counselors through credible personal referrals. Even then, apply the rules above. If a deal smells fishy, then it's probably rotten. Be careful.

Job Fairs: Part 1

Why do companies waste my time?



A job hunter files a complaint with employers: *I show up at the job fair, and the company reps tells me to go apply online. What's going on?*
Learn about the myths of job fairs.

Question

I'm sure a lot of employers read *Ask The Headhunter*, so this is an open question to them. Maybe they will respond. But I'd like your opinion, too.

To Employers:

I go to job fairs to meet your company in person, but your representatives tell me to visit the company website in order to apply for a job. Call me crazy, but I thought the purpose of a job fair was to actually meet you — a real, live hiring manager.

By going to a job fair, I am separating myself from those who are sitting at their computers all day just sending out résumés. I am making an effort to drive (please consider the cost of gas) to a job fair after getting all dolled up in a great suit and actually seeking to talk to someone to place my résumé ahead of my competition. I'm trying to stand out and show you I'm serious about working for you. And my reward for this effort? You slap me in the face and tell me to go home and check your website.

Why do you even bother "recruiting" at job fairs? Why is it that your representatives don't know anything about jobs at your company? Why do they tell me, "We are not taking résumés?" I didn't need to drive 20 miles to see you, only to have you tell me to go home and apply online. What if I'm someone who does not have Internet access at home? What if I'm that person who is strapped for cash and had to decide between paying for groceries this month or keeping an Internet service provider, and I chose to forego the Internet?

Come on! Give me a break. I go to job fairs so you can see a face behind my résumé in hopes of landing that interview! I attend so I can meet real flesh-and-blood hiring managers. And you send "personnel representatives" who

Job Fairs: Part 1

Why do companies waste my time?

don't even act like they work for your company! Maybe they don't! Why are you wasting my time?

(Thanks for letting me vent, Nick.)

Nick's Reply

Oh, you're welcome. Venting is good, especially when you're not the only one doing it. I get frequent complaints about job fairs.

You've nailed it. Job fairs are cattle calls, and largely a waste of time. This is one of the many mistakes internal recruiters make. Companies go to job fairs because human resources (HR) clearly has nothing better to spend its money on. They send greenhorn HR reps to collect résumés or to direct people to the website. You could do better standing on a street corner handing out your résumé.

I welcome HR managers to explain their behavior.

Let's dispel one of the key myths about job fairs: That they are a good place to actually meet the hiring managers. Let's dispel two more job fair myths.

Myth #1: You can cover a job fair with 300 employers in one day.

Even if you slice it down to 100, a six-hour job fair will allow you 3.6 minutes for each employer. Do you think that if you were to spend anywhere near six hours at a job fair you might get dizzy and pass out? Trust your common sense: That's not enough time for a meaningful exchange. Employers know that.

Suggestion:

Contact the job fair organizers and get detailed job fair information, including lists of companies and departments that are hiring, and lists of specific jobs. Instead of going to the fair, invest that six hours identifying and contacting people who work at three good target companies that will be at the job fair. Tell these folks you can't make it to the fair, and ask for their insight and advice about their company. "Is it a good place to work?" Then ask for introductions to managers who seem to be hiring. Save gas now; use it to attend meaningful interviews later.

Job Fairs: Part 1

Why do companies waste my time?

Job fair “jobs”

More than one HR manager has disclosed something interesting to me. Operating under legal requirements to demonstrate that employers give everyone a fair chance at jobs, HR resorts to job fairs to comply with the law.

In such cases, the purpose of the job fair is not to hire anyone. It's to collect as many résumés from as broad a cross-section of the unemployed public as possible, in order to meet the requirements of the law.

With new piles of paper and online job applications in hand, HR can “check off” the compliance boxes on federal equal opportunity hiring forms, showing that the employer has in fact solicited applicants fairly from the general population.

Lots of luck if you attended a job fair expecting to get interviewed for an actual job. ■

Myth #2: Job fairs are a great place to find unadvertised openings.

Any job openings advertised at job fairs are already old news. Job fairs are often a company's last recruitment resort. While a personnel jockey is scanning your résumé at the job fair booth, my candidate (or some other headhunter's) is sitting in the hiring manager's office demonstrating how she's going to do the job profitably for the manager. That's who you're competing with.

Suggestion:

Unadvertised openings are in managers' heads — they're still in the planning stage and HR doesn't know about them yet. Now you know where to go. Skip the places where HR clerks hang out (job fairs). Go to where the hiring managers and their employees go: Professional conferences, trade shows, and training courses.

Yes, bring a résumé, but first make some friends. Don't ask for a job. Ask for the gold ring that smart headhunters grab: Insight about the person's company and work. That's what leads to real relationships, real personal contacts, and valuable personal referrals to hiring managers. And that's where you will learn about unadvertised openings.

Job fairs are where many HR departments gleefully waste corporate recruiting budgets. Why? Because job fair operators are very good at marketing these events. I'll wager that these operators even provide “Useful Tips” to HR departments in which they explain, “You can send your greenhorn clerks instead of expensive managers to the fair! Save money and get tons of applicants!”

Need we say more? Thanks for sharing your story and ire. In the next section, we'll see what other job hunters, career coaches, college career center managers, and HR folks have to say about job fairs.

Job Fairs: Part 2

The inside scoop



Insiders reveal that job fairs are about lots of things, except maybe filling open jobs.

Commentary on job fairs

In the last section, we talked about two myths of job fairs. When that Q&A column was originally published, it drew lots of good (and useful) comments from a broad variety of readers. Here's the inside scoop that a few of them delivered about job fairs.

While one reader (who works in a college career center) claims job fairs are good for you, the rest tell another story: *Why companies really go to job fairs.*

This reader has a subversive approach to job fairs.

"Job Fairs are good, up to a point. You reach that unfortunate point when you get to the head of the long line of fellow would-be candidates and actually have to talk to some company's HR intern! The good part is talking to the people you meet in that line, and the local job market intelligence you can gather by striking up conversations and networking while you wait. That's how I learned about local job search networking groups and started getting a real education about companies in the area."

A career coach offers a dismaying perspective.

"Hi Nick. Many years ago, when Willie Brown was Mayor of San Francisco, he promoted what he thought was the job fair to end all job fairs. He hyped it up to the eyebrows with lots of costly TV commercials and print ads for weeks before the event. It was for a three-day weekend... Number of jobs found: Six. Just six jobs. I tell my clients they are better off doing the lottery. At least they won't come away so depressed."

A college career center manager thinks I'm steering you wrong.

"I have seen many of our students land on-campus interviews and eventual jobs because they had the ability to get in front of that recruiter [at the job fair]. Which means they made a connection which gave their résumé weight once submitted online. I think that candidates that think going to a fair is a

Job Fairs: Part 2

The inside scoop

waste of time are definitely wasting one more opportunity to get in front of the recruiter's face and make an impression. And advising candidates against attending these (by attending I mean actively putting the effort in engaging the employer – not just collecting brochures) is bad advice.”

Then there's the HR professional who spills the beans.

“As an HR professional who absolutely hates to attend job fairs (and will only do so when absolutely directed to by senior management), I can state that typically the jobs I've recruited for in fairs are those with high turnover. I was doing nothing but filling the pipeline with poor suckers that wouldn't want the job for more than six months or until they, too, could move on. If I happened to have a decent current vacancy, it was a bonus for attendees. What always bugged me was management's insistence on continually filling these revolving-door positions, rather than look at why people are leaving and fixing the problems to end the cycle.”

Are job fairs actually political events?

“I run a community-based non-profit, so I am familiar with job fairs. I can tell you one reason a lot of companies go to them: It fulfills their public service and public relations objectives. Many job fairs are sponsored by local elected officials and non-profit organizations, so companies show up to satisfy them. They know it's most likely a waste of time for themselves and for job seekers, but the local opinion leaders see them there and it puts the company in good stead with them. The only positive I can see from job fairs is that they serve as an educational tool for entry level job seekers and recent graduates by showing them the potential employers in the marketplace. In short, it's good PR.”

Finally, here's an HR recruiter who works the job fair booth.

“Why do companies recruit at job fairs? Answer: We are forced to. I'm an avid reader of your column and a recruiting assistant. We tell people to apply online because the head honchos feel they need to track things in a nationwide company, pull reports, get stats, etc. It helps them keep their legal jargon dotted and crossed in the proper places. It's basically really to benefit the employer. I personally hate applying that way to every place there is, because, 1) it's incredibly time consuming, and 2) I know somebody like me is sitting behind the desk with absolutely no decision-making authority on

Job Fairs: Part 2

The inside scoop

whether to hire someone. They will possibly pick out my résumé and put me through some canned questions that don't mean much and I have to hope I can get an interview."

Sometimes the best insight on a topic comes from *Ask The Headhunter* readers who work "on the inside" and can share the scoop with us. Thanks to all who took time to share their comments.

Headhunter ruses



Headhunters aren't in business to find you a job. But neither should they be poaching information from you to help them do their own job.

Question

Headhunters invariably ask me if I'm already interviewing with companies. They say they don't want to submit my name to a company that's already considering me because it could complicate the process and hurt my chances there. But here's my concern: If I reveal that I'm talking to XYZ company about an opening, the headhunter could present other candidates, increasing my competition. I usually decline to answer, but I feel like I'm offending someone whose assistance I'm seeking. What do you suggest?

Nick's Reply

You've discovered one of the common ruses used by unprincipled headhunters who are looking for new client companies: They pry for confidential information. Don't fall for it.

This is simple. The headhunter has no business asking what companies you're interviewing with on your own. Assuming you're interested in his assignment and the headhunter is interested in you, then the headhunter should (usually) tell you who his client company is and ask if you would like to interview there. (I say usually because certain searches require that the company's name be kept confidential. This is very rare.)

The argument that the headhunter "just needs to know" to ensure you're not already interviewing with his client is hogwash. He can just as easily determine that by divulging who his client is. After all, the headhunter called you, not the other way around. A good headhunter should not be bothered if you decline to divulge any companies you're talking with.

It is of course prudent to be polite and respectful, but you should expect the same behavior from any headhunter. If you don't see it, expect further ma-

Headhunter ruses

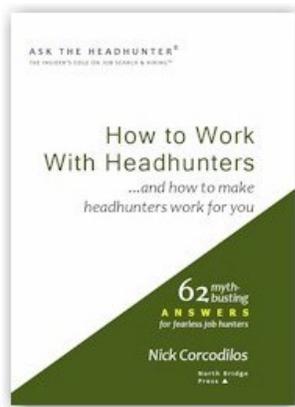
nipulation and exploitation. Prying for companies you're already talking with can yield new potential clients to the headhunter, but it's improper.

Another common ruse is used by these ne'er-do-wells to find more job candidates: They'll ask for your references before they make any real commitment to you. (A good headhunter doesn't ask for references in an initial call. He likely found you through a contact who knows you. In other words, the call is the result of good references!) The headhunter will then call your references and recruit them for other clients – or for the same job, to compete with you. This is not a good sign. A headhunter is in a position of trust. Violating that trust is wrong.

The problem you describe occurs because job hunters generally have the wrong expectations about headhunters. Headhunters aren't in business to find you a job. They're in business to find a new hire for their client. So you're helping the headhunter – not the other way around. Don't forget that. Be polite, be respectful, and be helpful. Even if this assignment isn't right for you, a headhunter remembers helpful contacts. Strike up a good relationship, and you may get a call about his next assignment. But don't ignore your common sense when dealing with a headhunter. Expect respect. That's how you'll know the good headhunters from the bad.

(For more about headhunters and their methods, please see [How to Work with Headhunters... and how to make headhunters work for you.](#))

More answers for fearless job hunters

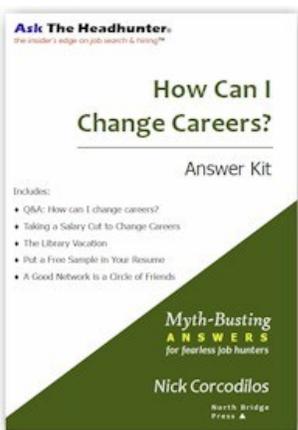


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- *What's the secret to getting on a headhunter's list?*
- *How can I become the headhunter's #1 candidate?*
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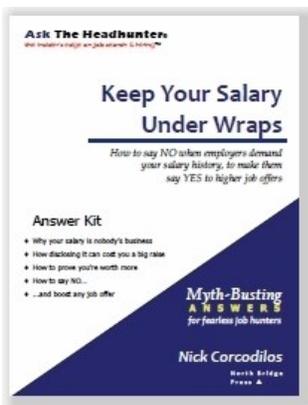


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- *Who says your salary history is anybody's business?*
- *Can disclosing your salary cost you a big raise?*
- *How can you prove you're worth more?*
- *How can you say NO... and get the best possible offer?*

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